

AN APOLOGY FOR HUSBANDS.

We do not use this word "apology" in its legitimate sense, as a defence or vindication; we are satisfied with the common meaning assigned to it—that is, an excuse or extenuation of an admitted offence. Husbands, as a general rule, are to blame, there is no doubt of that; only we think there are some small considerations which might be urged in their favor, not by way of exalting, but merely of letting them down easily.

The humane idea was long of occurring to us, for one gets so thoroughly accustomed to the condition of affairs in society, that everything seems natural and necessary, and passes on without exciting a thought. But a week or two ago, we had occasion to visit repeatedly a rather large and agreeable family without once chancing to meet with the offender; and this had the effect of bringing him before our cogitations. Had he been present in the room, he would have passed as a natural and useful piece of furniture, and so have escaped all special survey; but being obstinately absent, we of course turned the bull's-eye of our mind upon him, and had him up.

With regard to the family present, it consisted of a wife, one or two children, one or two growing up and a couple of grown-up daughters. All these were busy, from dolls and A B C's to dress-making and housekeeping. One of the daughters sang and played delightfully: another was an artist of considerable merit for an amateur; and both were adepts at needle-work. They boasted of making all but their best bonnets, and all but their ball-dresses. The mother was an excellent manager. Under her charge the business of the house went on like clock-work; everything was comfortable, everything agreeable, everything genteel. The boys were at school studying hard and successfully; one intending to be a merchant-prince, another to sit some day on the Woolsack, and the third to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Indeed, they were an exemplary family; and one day when we met the lady in the street, with her two grown-up daughters by her side, and the younger girls walking trippingly behind, all nicely dressed and happy-looking, it struck us that there was an expression of pride as well as pleasure in her face, and that she was inwardly assuming to herself the merit of having made her own position. We did not grudge her the feeling, for her self-satisfaction had been earned; if some such inward reward did not attend good conduct, it would be all the worse for us all in this world.

We had visited this happy family several times, when we began to inquire, while walking homeward in our usual meditative mood, what it was that held them together in so enviable a position. Their labors were all for themselves, for their own comfort, amusement, gentility, advancement.—They purchased nothing else with all this outlay of time and money. There they were, with no object but that of passing the day, of enjoying life, of rising to some condition of still higher distinction or contentment. How did they find this possible? By what power were they sustained immovable in the shocks of social life, surrounded by all the cares and anxieties, and competitions and heart-burnings, and tear and wear, and hurry

and scurry of the world? Here we caught with our mind's-eye the absentee, and immediately suspected that he was at the bottom of it! But it was curious to think, that he should be the sun of this social system—that so many individuals should lean supinely upon one, without the slightest idea of mutual support. Yet so it was—and is. Society is composed throughout almost its whole consistence of such circles, each wheeling with more or less harmony, but still wheeling round a centre; and that centre is the offender we have now up.

This individual, let us say, is unconscious of his own predicament. He knows he has a wife and children, a house and servants to provide for, and he does provide. That is all. He takes no merit to himself, and none is due. In supporting this Atlantean burden, he only does what others do. It is the rule. And so he bends his shoulders, and on he goes: sometimes stepping out like a giant, sometimes tottering, sometimes standing still to bemoan his fortune—not in having the load to bear, but in being unable to bear it well. If things go smoothly—if his children are well taught, if his dinner and his daughters are well dressed, if his house is tidy and genteel—why, then, if he is a praiseworthy person, he thanks God and his wife. If things go otherwise, he grumbles at his hard fate, and makes himself as disagreeable as possible, or else trundles his canister like a stoic; but all this time, be it observed, in utter unconsciousness of his true position. He does not think it odd that he is travelling in his round of life with a tail after him like a comet. He does not think about it at all. He only knows that the thing exists, and must be borne. If he is able of his own strength to bear it handsomely, so much the better; but if not, he never speculates on the possibility of deriving comfort and support from what is naturally a burden, any more than the wife and children imagine that they are anything else than a tail, with nothing in the world to think of, or to do, but to stick fast to the body to which they chance to be attached, and make themselves as comfortable as possible.

And this last is the curious part of the story. The amiable family we have described talked of the individual we have laid hold of with the perfect knowledge that he was their Centre, but without the faintest consciousness that there was anything but the mechanical tie between them. They humored him when he was in good-humor, called him a dear, good, old papa, got his slippers ready, and drew in his chair to the hearth, for that made the room all the more cheerful for themselves; but when in bad-humor, they avoided or crossed him, wondering how anybody could look sulky at such a bright fireside, and suspecting him to be a man incapable of feeling interest in anything but his business, or his clerks, or his banker's book. Was not his wife to be pitied, after all she had done to make him happy and respectable? And was not this a sorry return to his daughters, for saving him a mint of money by making their own dresses? These excellent ladies had nothing to do with the stability of their Centre. The house might be on fire, but they were only lodgers. They had no interest in the offender when he was out of their sight. They

knew nothing of his crosses and losses, of his disappointments and vexations, of his faintness and weariness: they saw nothing but discontent on his wrinkling brow, nothing but approaching age in his whitening hair, nothing but ill-humor in his querulous voice, nothing but selfish apathy in his spiritless eye and sinking heart. They loved the husband and the father when he was agreeable enough to be loved; but they had no sympathy with the struggling man.

This is the ground of our apology. That the husband is a bad fellow is only too clear, but we would suggest that there are extenuating circumstances. The world is a hard task-master, and he who strives with it must submit sometimes to the hard word and the hard blow. His brow cannot always be clear or his mind present. He cannot always be in the mood to feel the comfort he sees; and he will sometimes sit down even at a bright fireside, with bright faces round him, and feel as if he were in a desert. Is sympathy, dear ladies, only for the happy? Is not his business yours! Is it not politic as well as kind to protect from feeling the rubs of the world that intelligent and susceptible machine to which you owe your all? In low life, in middle life, in high life, however, the same curious arrangement prevails, hitherto, so far as we know, undescribed or misunderstood. Ebenezer Elliott felt it without knowing what it was. His *Poor Andrew* feels his heart grow faint, when on going home from his work he approaches his own door, behind which he knows there are living things, as silent to his bosom as the dead. He has one consolation, however: it lies in his dog and cat; and the poor soul, yearning for sympathy, is at his wits' end when he does not meet the welcome of these, his only true friends.

My cat and dog when I come home,
Run out to welcome me—
She mewing, with her tail on end,
While wagging his comes he;
They listen for my homeward steps,
My smothered sob they hear,
When down my heart sinks, deathly down,
Because my home is near.
My heart grows faint when home I come—
May God the thought forgive!
If 'twere not for my dog and cat,
I think I could not live.
Why come they not? They do not come
My breaking heart to meet!
A heavier darkness on me falls—
I cannot lift my feet.
O yes, they come!—they never fail
To listen for my sighs;
My poor heart brightens when it meets
The sunshine of their eyes.
Again they come to meet me—God!
Wilt thou the thought forgive?
If 'twere not for my dog and cat,
I think I could not live.

The people's poet, we say, feels this without understanding it; for he attributes the want of sympathy to the want of knowledge—to the want of a power of response, on the part of the family, to the new ideas that are gushing up in the mind of the intelligent workman! Alas, Ebenezer! there is something in a case like this even better

than knowledge. The most ignorant of all possible wives may do more, by a single look, to sustain and advance her husband, than the most acutely argumentative of all she-philosophers.

The French, as a nation, make a similar mistake. They are not so domestic as the English, and care less about that external comfort which commonly bounds the duties and ambition of an English wife. They run less risk, therefore, of taking the show for the substance, and see clearly enough that there ought to be some electrical rapport between the husband and his harem. The desideratum they consider to be a sympathy of taste. The wife, they say, should comprehend and feel interested in her husband's pursuits; she should be able to talk to him intelligently of what has occupied him through the day—to plunge with him into business, or politics, or literature—and to advise with him on the circumstances of his position. What is this but repeating the lessons that have wearied him, the annoyances that have worried him, the labors that have sent him home jaded and spiritless, or dissatisfied and irritable? Nature herself shows the impropriety of this arrangement; for, in nine cases out of ten, when men and women are left to their own choice in marriage, they are attracted by antagonism rather than homogeneousness, in at least the external points of the character, and even in personal appearance.

A similarity of taste is doubtless desirable, if on one side unobtrusive or undemonstrative; but what is really wanted is sympathy with the *man*—consideration for the Atlas who carries the household on his shoulders. We readily pardon the fretfulness of the sick; we consent without hesitation to tread lightly by the couch of pain; but who can tell what sickness of the heart, what torture of the head, may be indicated in that troubled look, that gloomy eye, that rigid lip, that thoughtful brow? It is more than womanly to bear with a harsh word—to steal round the offender with a noiseless step—to soothe him with a soft word or a loving look—to remember that to him his family owe their comfort and tranquility—that he is like a rock, in the lee of which they recline in safety, while on its bald and whitened head break the thunder and the storm?

Yes; in his case there *are* extenuating circumstances. But let him beware that he does not plume himself upon them, instead of regarding them as merely something that would justify a humane judge in recommending him to mercy. Sympathy cannot long exist unanswered; and the action and response cannot take place but between minds that are in a state of rapport. We will take you, sir, as your own witness. Do you take care to place yourself habitually in this state with your family? If you do not enter into their feelings, do you expect them to enter into yours? Are you content to be defined as merely "the gentleman who draws cheques?" Or do you teach them that you are a little community of individuals, sifted together by God and nature for mutual solace and support, with one moral being, one interest, one love, one hope? Do not answer in a hurry. Think of it, dream of it, ponder over it. There—that will do. Stand down, sir.—*Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*.